

OF BRITISH GUIANA

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among unmarried girls for the attention of an eligible bachelor on these occasions. A young man between the ages of about fifteen and eighteen makes a point of "going the rounds," attending sprees at as many settlements as he can, and thereby meeting as many eligible girls as possible. His father usually takes a paternal interest in his amorous intrigues, by arranging trips which will enable the young fellow to "see the world." Thus, the average young woman and young man enjoy a series of affairs during their youth. It is rarely that a girl becomes pregnant during this period. The reasons for this I am not sure of, but informants are definite in stating that both contraceptive methods and abortion are used. The opinion seems to be prevalent, however, that an unmarried girl uses these methods infrequently. It is possible, of course, that a certain number of conceptions which might arise from such casual unions are prevented by temporary sterility and by ineptness of technique. 836

Contraceptive measures may be used by both men and women. They take two forms: bush medicines which may be self-administered, usually as infusions; and ritualistic treatments by the piayen.¹ Abortion is induced usually by old women who are skilled in such matters. They administer an infusion of bush herbs to the patient, which is said to induce violent abdominal cramps. Manual assistance is given by kneading the abdomen, and, occasionally, it is said, small sharp sticks are inserted into the vagina "to open the woman up." The latter method is said to produce chronic infertility which can be cured only by the piayen. My information on this subject is somewhat indefinite inasmuch as the methods are for the most part in the hands of women and piayen, who, when questioned, naturally profess ignorance of the subject. A certain plant, of which I have specimens which have not been identified, is drunk as an infusion by the men, and is said to make "a man run water." It is effective for only a day or two after use. All male informants agreed, often volunteering the information, that contraceptive and abortive methods of one sort or another are in use. 842 847

Premarital sexual affairs theoretically take place only between individuals who are eligible to marry, i.e. those who are not siblings or parallel cousins. Incest tabus apply to siblings and parallel 835

¹ Priest or medicine man.

606 the other hand, a man always speaks to his son-in-law through his daughter in similar affairs. Occasional exceptions to this rule occur in cases where the two men have been exceptionally good friends of long standing before the marriage.

A man is even more "ashamed" in the presence of his mother-in-law and, although he may see her, hardly ever speaks to her directly.

A woman's relations to her parents-in-law are also reserved, but her contact with them is rare, due to the practice of matrilocal and independent residence.

We shall describe other kinship usages revolving about the marriage relationship in our analysis of the kinship system.

833 Sexual intercourse normally takes place in the hammock in the so-called European position.

843 A woman calculates the date of parturition by counting the months from the stoppage of menstruation. When she feels the foetus move in her womb she believes that birth will take place a month hence. Calculation of the precise day is seldom attempted.

If a man desires a male child, he searches until he finds a small root of cassava which resembles a penis and testicles. At a moment when his wife has turned away from him he throws this against her back, and turns around casually as if he had done nothing. If the woman picks up the root, she will give birth to a boy. There is also said to be a method of producing a female child, but my informants did not know what it is.

● 842 The following method of insuring the fertility of a woman is in use. An old woman, at the behest of the husband, mixes the macerated root of a plant called murewa with rubbish and sweepings from the floor of the patient's house. This mixture is burned, and the ashes are administered to the wife in cassiri, without her knowledge.

843 During pregnancy, "after the wife has swelled up," intercourse between the spouses ceases until about a month after birth. During this time a man satisfies himself elsewhere.

Thoughts, behavior, or experiences of a woman during pregnancy are not believed to influence the personality or appearance of the child in any way.

844 At the birth the mother rests on a bed of leaves on the floor of her house. She may be assisted by other women, who exert pres-

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sure on her abdomen by encircling it with their arms while squatting behind her. Men are excluded from the clearing during the process of birth. It was said by two informants that occasionally wooden hooks were used to assist difficult births. Other informants knew nothing of such a usage. 844

A birth took place in Sawari during my stay there, and I happened to arrive in Turingbang settlement about five minutes after one had occurred. In both cases the mothers were up and about their household duties the next day, although obviously in a weakened condition. The babies were wrapped in old cloths and put to the breast immediately. The umbilical cord was buried in the bush with the placenta. The couvade practices are described in the section on Religion. 846

Both boys and girls are desired, although when asked to make a choice, men say that they prefer to have boy children because they are so much more useful. 842 ●

Babies are bathed at least once a day in cold water. If a child cries at night, the mother frequently will get up and dash cold water on it to quiet it. 846

Personal names are of the nickname variety. When the baby is a few days old, the mother gives it a name. Alec's, for instance, was Apotopopo ("Big Head"). When the child reaches adolescence the parents give it another name; in Alec's case this was Tunde ("One who Carries Things"). The childhood name is used about the house as a term of address by other members of the family. There seems to be no tabu on the use of this name by other people, although a grown person is "ashamed" if his mother uses his childhood name. Jokes are made between grown persons on their respective childhood names. The adult name, however, is strictly a personal matter, and all persons past puberty are addressed in kinship terms. Only extremely close friends know each other's names, and this knowledge is regarded as a matter of confidence. Two men who have been very close to each other for a considerable time may be talking and laughing together. Suddenly one will say, "What is your name?" The other will tell him, and there will be an exchange of names. It is believed that a magician or, in some cases, a priest-doctor can work black magic more effectively against an individual whose name he knows. The name itself cannot be conjured with *per se*, but it is believed 553

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168 a child (1936:76). No adult of reproductive age seems to have re-
834 mained for long outside of a marriage bond. Extramarital sexual
[837] encounters were not uncommon, and adolescents were not prevented from
[836] sexual experimentation (1936:72). The separation of sexual partners
did not intervene to limit population size.

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[756] Contraceptive measures are reported to have been familiar to both
men and women (1936:73). These include "bush medicines" and "ritual-
istic treatments" performed by a plainman or shaman. However, the
exact species are not identified and their efficacy as well as the
incidence of their use are not noted. Old women were reported to have
[887] been experienced in inducing abortions through the use of an infusion
[847] of bush herbs and manual manipulation including the insertion of small,
sharp sticks.

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168 Aside from these behavioral controls, there apparently were
physiological factors at work. These are mentioned but their effects
cannot be established. Gillin notes, for example, that it was rare
for an adolescent girl to become pregnant (1936:73). Regarding this
observation, Gillin suggests that temporary sterility and ineptness
of technique may explain the lack of pregnancies. Also, the incidence
[164] of malaria, hook worm, round worm, and other parasites may have con-
tributed to periods of sexual inactivity and temporary sterility as
well as affecting the mortality of infants and others.

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162 In sum, for the 1932-33 period, those behavioral and physiological
factors which affected population size were recorded without regard
for their situational context. Still, the reproductive results seem
clear: i.e., the ratio of adults to children was about one to one in

163 The number of children ever born range between four and seven to
*177 those women who are fifty-five or older. The range is eight to four-
teen for the women between forty and fifty-four. In other words, the
seven women fifty-five and older have had a total of thirty-seven
children of which thirty survived to adulthood. To date, the seven
women forty to fifty-four have had a total of eighty-one children of
which sixty-five survive. And some women in this younger age group
have not ceased reproducing. The women in this category are sub-
divided into those forty to forty-four and those forty-five to fifty-
four so that further reproductive potential is evident. The average
is 5.3 children ever born with 4.3 surviving to adulthood for the
women fifty-five and older. For the women forty to fifty-four, the
average is 11.6 children ever born with 9.3 surviving. This is more
than a doubling of the number of births as well as those children
surviving.

The 1960 Government census provides a check on the age group of
women fifty-five and older. At that time, these women were forty-
five and older. Birth records collected at that time are reported in
Table 11. The same pattern of a greater number of births to younger
women is apparent.

- 842 Concerning a popular knowledge of contraception, ignorance for
the most part is expressed by both men and women. It is known that
[889] older women can identify a small leaf and a vine which boiled together
[278] and administered as a drink is supposed to render a woman permanently
sterile. No one is reported to have used this measure. An effective
847 method, infanticide, is practiced.¹⁶ This may occur with a young

847 This may occur with a young
[848] mother with an insecure relationship with the father or a child that
[511] is not her husband's. Also, a poor subsistence situation may inspire
a woman to neglect or kill her infant. From the confidences expressed,
there have occurred about five cases of infanticide over the last ten

842 years. Aside from these measures, some women have expressed desires
to limit the number of children they produce but profess a lack of
163 knowledge on how to do so. With every fertile woman approaching the
fulfillment of a potential to reproduce twelve to thirteen children,
the implications for accelerating population growth are apparent.

[657] Also, with medical attention and other government assistance, the
[165] number of children who survive has increased.

163 Over the last forty years, the reproductive pattern of the
*177 Barama River Carib population seems to have responded to changes in
178 economic conditions. There is no evidence to demonstrate that this
population was ever in any long period of equilibrium with regard to
its size, or well regulated by cultural practices to maintain it below

175 any direct relationship to fluctuations in local food resources. On
931 the contrary, it appears that this population previously underwent
conditions of famine from time to time. King (1968:16) reports a
drought for Guyana every thirteen to fourteen years. Although there
are no direct records kept for the Upper Barama River area, there are

[657] indications of periodic local food shortages. In the six years
previous to the establishment of development programs at Baramita
Air Strip, the Government was called upon twice to send relief food
packages to the Caribs not directly involved in mining. However,
by this time, the total population was influenced by the mining